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ABSTRACT

"Postsecondary education" emphasizes open admissions, remedial and mastery education, career training, and lifelong learning. It charges low tuition and attracts both full-time and part-time commuter students. It is offered at proprietary schools, public and private two-year colleges, vocational-technical schools, trade schools, and hospital-based nursing and other allied health programs. By contrast, "higher education" emphasizes programs in the liberal arts and professions, is characterized by selective admissions and competition and primarily attracts full-time resident students of a limited age group (18-24). Responsibility for the future development of "postsecondary education" rests with state governments. They must recognize that the movement of citizens around the country makes the geographic configurations of states unimportant and should set as a goal the establishment of an educational common market in the United States, which might include student aid grants applicable anywhere, free student movement within states, and financial credit for each student to use throughout his lifetime. Community colleges should offer a three-year baccalaureate, upper division technical study, and direct pre-professional curricula, and should include selected secondary students in a "middle college". (DC)

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THE POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION RESPONSIBILITIES OF STATE GOVERNMENT: A COMMUNITY COLLEGE PERSPECTIVE

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THE POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION RESPONSIBILITIES OF STATE GOVERNMENT: A COMMUNITY COLLEGE PERSPECTIVE

INTRODUCTION

"The neatest way to get rid of a superfluous 18-year-old is to amuse him all day long at a community college while his family feeds and houses him. This is not only cheaper than a residential college, but cheaper than supporting him on welfare, a make-work job, in prison, or in the armed forces." That represents one assessment of higher education by critique, Carolyn Bird, in her book "The Case Against College." And of course she's right. When you consider the alternatives of not educating young adults and restricting access to education for older adults, you quickly realize that welfare payments, the army, public works projects and incarceration in state and federal penal institutions is not only a lot more costly but does not greatly benefit society in the long run considering the public taxes expended.

The ensuing discussion concerns itself with three dimensions of education today - first, the meaning and parameters of post-secondary education; second, the role of the community college; and third, the concurrent relationship of state government. Everyone seems acutely sensitive today about the methods used in gathering tax dollars and the ways in which theyare parceled out. Carolyn Bird again comments that "there is a limit to what the taxpayers are willing to spend for higher education - and the limit is in sight." State aid to higher education has grown more than fourteen times between 1950 and the first part of this decade. Not only has the voracious appetite of higher education consumed more and more state tax money, but that contribution has increased from about one-fifth of the operating income of colleges and universities to over one-quarter. And as these costs escalate, educational and political cassandras predict the demise of the student enrollments that fueled the growth of the sixties.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

"American higher education is at a kind of crossroads... the pace of growth has slowed and a decline is often predicted for the years ahead." Dr. Howard R. Bowen then went on to substantiate his statement by an analysis of demographic statistics that predicted that the pool of 18-24 year olds, the traditional college age market for higher education, would rise slowly in the seventy's, decline in the 1980's and increase again in the 1990's. The Pennsylvania Department of Education envisions a peak enrollment in higher education in the Commonwealth to occur in 1979, with a decline thereafter until 1985 when their crystal ball grows dark. American high school graduates will diminish after 1978.

There are two caveats, however, to be observed in examining American higher education and its financing. First - while higher education may be entering a period of stable enrollments and for some segments a decline, the same is not true for post-secondary education. Second - the definition of the market place is commonly viewed as the 18 to 24 year-old but this represents only one segment of the post-secondary education population.

What then is meant by post-secondary education if it is something distinct and different from higher education? First of all, post-secondary education is a much more inclusive term. It includes higher education within its fold but then goes beyond those parameters. Higher education has sought to selectively exclude those who might fail through restrictive admissions procedures designed to predict future academic performance from past achievement. Higher education has appealed typically to those between the ages of 18 and 24 who enroll as full-time resident learners. Higher education has concentrated on programs in the liberal arts and professions. Higher education has usually required captive audiences for four years of undergraduate study.

Post-secondary education goes beyond those limits. It espouses an open-door admissions policy geared toward giving everyone the opportunity to succeed rather than keeping out those who might fail. It concentrates on future potential rather than past achievement. It recognizes that of all the variable factors examined in an attempt to predict future success such as IQ, high-school English grades, class standing, college board scores, verbal ability, writing skills, only one has been shown to be a valuable indicator - age The older the potential student, the more likely he is to succeed. Yet age is not the critical factor. Age only correlates to the main cause for human success in learning-motivation.

In taking all who want a chance, post-secondary education offers remedial and developmental education as an integral ingredient in the program to keep the open door from becoming the revolving door. In America we have always valued political and social democracy. The realization of post-secondary education is the achievement of educational democracy.

Not only does post-secondary education admit the masses and provide programs to remedy skill deficiencies, it breaks other educational barriers. It has opened opportunities for the part-time student who cannot afford in terms of time or tuition to commit himself to being a full-time student. The responsibilities of job and family should not prevent career advancement or career changes. The scheduling flexibility of post-secondary education has not only enhanced the ability of adults to attend on a part-time basis, but it has opened new doors for the undereducated in American society - women, prison inmates, the handicapped, "experienced adults" or senior citizens, and the educationally and economically disadvantaged.

Another essential component of post-secondary education has been its emphasis upon career training. Usually including a mix of technical and liberal education, the emphasis has been on preparing the individual for employment in the labor market by helping him to acquire entry-level skills and task competencies. Studies indicate

that today's workers will progress through three to five occupations before retirement. It is to post-secondary education that he will return for new skills. The need for a strong post-secondary educational system providing diversified two-year career education has never been greater and it will increase in the next quarter century. America was founded on the ideals of the free enterprise system, but now we hear more and more talk of tinkering and tampering with the labor supply to keep it continually adjusted with swings in the job market. We sometimes forget that competition in the market place has been the best regulator rather than bureaucrats in a central office.

The continuing decline in the percentage of workers employed in industries that turn out products has been compensated by a spectacular rise of service industries. Nearly three-quarters of American workers are expected to be providing services by the end of this century. We find that education becomes increasingly important in ensuring the necessary trained personnel. And as the expense rises to graduate increasing numbers of physicians, dentists, and lawyers, it becomes not only easier but more economical to help cushion and absorb a greater proportion of this demand with physician's assistants, dental assistants, dental hygienists, laboratory technicians, and other para-professionals. Only in this way, perhaps, can we continue to secure the care we expect at a price we can afford. It is to post-secondary education that we must turn to meet this new and burgeoning labor demand.

The commitment of post-secondary education to life-long learning has meant more than disregarding age in admission to programs. It requires the structuring of courses and programs to educate the total citizen. The shortening workweek and earlier retirement has demanded an educational response to our increasing leisure time that parallels the programs designed for our working world.

Post-secondary education usually draws its students from a geographic region that allows attendance as a commuter. This assists in keeping student costs down

which coupled with the normally lower tuition of public post-secondary education has been another reason for its growth. The types of institutions delivering post-secondary education are extremely varied. Divided among proprietary, public, and private institutions, they specialize in two-year education with some programs of an even shorter duration. They include vocational-technical schools and institutions, trade schools, hospital-based nursing and other allied health programs, and a myriad of other institutions and enterprises.

The potential clientele for students in post-secondary education, in the last quarter of this century, is then definitely not limited to the 18 to 24-year old. The average age of the community college student is nearly 30. The consumer market in education encompasses the total population of the nation over 18 and even some younger. This yields a potential to be served by the year 2000 or over 200 million people. Thus it becomes extremely critical to enunciate and renew our public policy on post-secondary education to justify the commitment in tax funds necessary to meet public expectations.

But even in examining the limited age bracket of 18 to 24, the Carnegie Commission has estimated that by the year 2000 it will be 50% greater than it was in 1970. The traditional 18 to 24 age category has more than a million less women than men attending college. Nearly four times the percentage of students from families earning more than $15,000 attend as compared with those from low-income families. Many states, partly because of limited and restrictive state policies with respect to post-secondary education, have half as many of its 18 to 24 year olds attend college as compared with other states. There is a potential to be served that is limited not so much by absolute numbers of interest, but more by our ability and willingness to deliver.

The equalization of educational opportunity coupled with a responsiveness to these demands by post-secondary institutions has and will continue to experience a

strong surge of growth in the next decades ahead. Public policy as established by state legislatures which begins to veer from this commitment to equal educational opportunity; that restricts access because of geography, age, past education, social position, sex, or physical handicap; that discourages educational flexibility and diversified programming; that stifles the continued development of proper and adequate physical facilities; that raises student tuition beyond the reach of the masses - will choke and throttle post-secondary education to the detriment of our society. Only now are women, minorities, prison inmates, handicapped, blue-collar workers, senior citizens, and a host of others beginning to sample post-secondary education and join the mainstream of America's educated society.

THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Public community colleges have been the impetus for the development of post-secondary education in America - and most of this has occurred since 1960. They have become America's educational supermarkets offering numerous specialty shops that appeal to the total spectrum of American society eighteen and over. As institutions of higher education, they provide the first two years of traditional baccalaureate programs. But they have done it with an open-door admissions policy that has taken society's educational risks and programmed them for success by coupling academic and career education with remedial training and counseling. Many community colleges today find that selected-admissions private four-year colleges are taking more of their transfer students than public colleges and universities with lower admission requirements.

The commitment of community colleges to career education has been its major strength. Within a decade many have seen the majority of its students shift from selecting transfer programs to now choosing career education. Increasing numbers of students with baccalaureate degrees are registering in the myriad of technical and

vocational programs that at a typical community college may number more than twenty-five. The rise of the community college has been an astounding phenomenon that can only be compared with the passage of the Morrill Act over a hundred years ago that brought the development of the American land grant colleges and universities. The United States last year had 3,055 colleges and universities. Public colleges numbered almost half of the total with community colleges representing nearly two-thirds of them or thirty percent of all the colleges and universities in the United States. Thirty-four states now have substantive community college systems. Sixteen have no system or opted for a minimal commitment to this nation's major delivery vehicle for post-secondary education. A further illustration of the growth of the community colleges may be seen in the increase in local tax money allocated for the education of adults. While state aid has increased since 1950, it went primarily to four-year colleges and universities delivering higher education. Local aid expanded more than sixteen fold and has been used nearly exclusively to support community colleges providing post-secondary education.

First time enrollment in the last quarter century has experienced a growth of 500% in the public sector, but less than 200% for private institutions. With the ratio of public to private colleges nearly equal 25 years ago, it now is over 3 to 1. The fall 1975 total undergraduate enrollment was slightly less than 10 million students with nearly one-third in community colleges. Remember those prognostications of declining registrations in higher education? Look again. They all predict a continuing rise in community college enrollment maintaining it as a major growth industry.

STATE GOVERNMENT

One of the greatest threats to the continued orderly development of post-secondary education in America rests with state government. There needs be a renewal of the partnership between state and local governments that gave rise to the community college movement. Public-policy with respect to education must be reaffirmed in its roots and that earlier commitment revitalized.

Rather than view public taxes as a cost and expenditure, we should better appreciate their value as assets and an investment. Public money spent on social services has a limited long-term impact on the community. Funds spent on physical capital have an immediate impact but depreciate in value over their life expectancy. Public funds spent on education, however, are an investment in human capital that appreciates in value over the life period of the recipient. And that life expectancy may be far longer than roads and highways. Rather than looking upon academic administrators and faculty as educational vendors, they should be more properly regarded as investment counselors.

Dr. Howard Bowen, in calculating the value of this investment, has reaffirmed the results of other studies that the "social rate of return to investments in higher education is in the range of 8 to 20 percent." So, just as a state legislature elected for the moment should not saddle future generations with a debt they cannot carry, nor should they impoverish the future by withholding the funds necessary to develop our society's human potential and improve the quality of life. A sputnik, war, or other national calamity should not be required to cause us to prepare wisely for our national development.

What then could and should state government do assuming, of course, a continued commitment in public policy to the goals of equalization of access to educational opportunities? A state's Master Plan for Post-Secondary Education

should carefully and realistically determine and define the missions of the various segments of post-secondary education. Public, private, and proprietary - two-year, four-year, and graduate have important roles to play in providing a diversified educational system with the continued flexibility to meet future challenges.

The missions of the various segments of post-secondary education have become blurred in many states with widespread poaching on each other's supposedly protected turf. This unnecessary competition can result in expensive and duplicative programs and facilities serving no useful purpose. Mission statements for post-secondary institutions mandated by the state after proper input are a necessity if (1) a diversified educational system is to be preserved, (2) public funds are to be targeted to properly support public education, and (3) equality of educational opportunity and access is to be provided. It is then not so much a question of the quantity of tax dollars spent on post-secondary education, but how and where they are spent.

In 1789, the adoption of the Federal Constitution eliminated tariff barriers in interstate commerce, but as we approach the decade of the 1980's, we have yet to eliminate educational tariff barriers, not only between states but within. The movements of our citizens around the country make the geographic configurations of our states less and less important. The states should set as a goal the establishment of an educational common market in the United States. Student aid grants should be applicable anywhere and institutional contracting across state lines should be encouraged to provide proper programming for an area at the least possible cost. Second, students should be given academic passports to travel anywhere within their state and attend the institution that provides the desired program, institutional philosophy, and teaching system that best meets their needs. Some states have adopted charge-back legislation to ensure that local communities not sponsoring a two-year post-secondary institution cannot escape their responsibilities. Others have removed restrictions on state subsidies when students cross

local subdivisions. But other states still have internal barriers that limit student access to post-secondary education.

Direct aid to students needs a drastic overhaul to bring it in line with the needs of post-secondary education. Aid programs initially designed for the student in higher education do not properly fund the new students in post-secondary education. It is far too common for state student-aid programs to discriminate against (1) the part-time student, (2) those in need of remedial education as part of their degree program, (3) inmates in state and federal prisons, (4) convicted felons who have been released, and (5) students engaged in short-term educational programs that do not require two years for completion. Low maximum grant awards and unrealistic income restrictions strike at the middle class who pay the bulk of our taxes but have limited disposable income that can be spent on post-secondary education. Perhaps each citizen should have an educational credit bank from which to draw throughout his lifetime, thus allowing the citizen the opportunity to determine his own priorities, his own programs, the institution of his choice, and the time and the way in which he wishes to learn.

The tax system is also in need of reform. The value of locally sponsored two-year post-secondary institutions with significant local funding is fast being eroded by the far too common practice of relying upon the property tax for this support. The equity of placing the burden of local community college support on the property tax has long been called into question. Recent court cases may soon impel state legislatures to recognize this injustice and demand a solution. Local support should be maintained, but the system of taxation should not mitigate against equal educational opportunity within the state. Access to post-secondary education should not be a geographic accident of birth.

Well-intentioned laws and their resulting regulations have sometimes caused an impact opposite to that intended. Laws and regulations, for instance, affecting

access to public facilities for the physically handicapped have sometimes proved to be detrimental in their application to both the handicapped and nonhandicapped. The shrinking availability of public funds for capital expenditures has caused many state education departments to encourage the use of existing facilities within the state rather than the continual expansion of physical plants. Older buildings sometimes must be extensively renovated in order to comply with handicapped regulations. In some cases, the cost of renovation can exceed the cost of replacement. State funds for new construction is becoming increasingly limited. The updating of current facilities to comply with the spirit of handicapped regulations will require new tax money. If the public college undertook to implement a new program without any thought as to its effect, it would be severely and justifiably criticized. Yet state legislators continually pass laws without regard to or knowledge of its financial, social, and educational implications. A community impact statement should be required before any law is enacted. Those laws that mandate local expenditures for new state policies should have the state checks firmly attached for implementation.

New state efforts for regional and statewide planning has caused considerable consternation - not so much because of the intent but due to the implementation. Central planning bureaus operate apart from regional commissions. Different state departments plan for the same activity differently with conflicting results. Local needs are sometimes thwarted by state perceptions. Some states are divided into a multiplicity of overlapping planning regions such as health, education, sewerage, water, transportation, and county configurations. These regions criss and cross the state with little rhyme or reason. In Pennsylvania the governor has divided the state into planning regions while his own Department of Education has delineated a different set and still these conflict with the community college service boundaries. No wonder the local citizen and institution becomes bewildered. It is not that planning is bad, it is bad planning that is worse. Information required of educational

institutions for local, state, and national planning agencies is also consuming an increasing number of man hours, which has detrimental effects on an institution's productivity and efforts to contain costs. State funds to implement proper planning, at any level, have been inadequate in most cases, if not totally non-existent.

Aid to institutions is in need of closer scrutiny. Perhaps some public institutions should be allowed to die or decline in dignity. Some must learn to manage with stable enrollments. While no segment should be developed at the expense of the other, neither should public education compete for the same tax dollar with private institutions. Public aid to private education should be with tax funds that are in addition to those for public institutions - and only when the health of the public sector has been assured. Private colleges requesting and receiving state aid should also expect public trustees on their boards and increased accountability.

New and different delivery systems for post-secondary education have been emerging in the past five years. They include consortial community colleges tying together existing two and four-year institutions, including proprietary, public and private, to better utilize existing human and physical resources. A second approach has been to expand possibilities for contractual relationships among institutions and between institutions and the state government. This can help colleges cope by pooling regional resources for maximum efficiency. A third development has been the external degree permitting the attainment of college credits and degrees without the benefit of regular classroom instruction. A fourth effort has been aimed at credentialling learning wherever and however it is acquired with the granting of college credits toward a degree.

Many other nontraditional approaches have been developed and will continue to emerge. Some have the potential to contain costs while maintaining quality.

Few states provide incentives. Some even discourage these efforts by limiting or withholding state aid either to the student or to the institution for (1) shortening the educational process, (2) credentialing human experience for academic credit, or (3) developing consortial and cooperative arrangements.

The September, 1976 issue of Change magazine issued a report rating 2,163 colleges and universities utilizing sixteen financial variables and five classifications. Among the significant factors which emerged was the fact that community colleges represent the most healthy segment of post-secondary education in America. And yet, over seventeen percent of public institutions are in the neutral to unhealthy categories. It is not the current state that is so alarming but rather the trends that have been established and the patterns that are emerging for the future that cause consternation. One conclusion of the report was that "the general tightening of state budgets is beginning to have a measurable impact. The imposition by some states of arbitrary percentage increases that will be expended on higher education without corollary limitations on the number of students to be admitted, the expansion of expensive remedial programs, and attempt to provide equal educational opportunity to those admitted and the continual limitations placed on public institutions and their search for nonstate funds could all contribute to this deteriorating situation."

Another observation that emerged from the report was that those regions of the country with the lowest rates of economic growth had the lowest percentages of its institutions in the healthy categories. Thus New England and the Middle Atlantic States were significantly depressed with respect to post-secondary education as opposed to the remainder of the country. And it also seems observable that these same two regions might be becoming the most restrictive with respect to continued public funding for post-secondary education. It might be contended that decreasing

the state's investment and commitment to post-secondary education will further adversely affect the economy and the ability of these states to weather economic business cycles. It will thus serve to accelerate that area's economic decline rather than enhance its growth and flexibility in meeting future changing conditions.

But throwing more money at education is not always wise public policy. The all too familiar shot-gun approach for funding higher education has resulted in more doing less.

This does not alleviate nor take from the shoulders of community colleges and other institutions engaged in post-secondary education the responsibilities to improve their services, contain costs, and increase their accountability to students and the public. While no segment of post-secondary education has been held more accountable to the public than the community college, there is more that the community college can and should do to continue to earn the taxpayer's trust. Institutions should undergo periodic educational audits. Its programs and services should be regularly evaluated to insure that they are continuing to meet student and manpower needs. A zero-based budgeting system could help insure that older programs and services were not being carried for the sake of tradition or continued as a commitment to staff. The priorities of the institution should be constantly reexamined for community relevancy. External experts might be brought in to review institutional practices to prevent them from reflecting the institution's lowest common denominator. Where sunshine laws don't shine, then their spirit should be kindled by local initiative. Perhaps even sunset regulations should apply to programs and services with periodic positive action by trustees required for renewal and reaffirmation if they are to continue.

Perhaps a further reexamination of the mission of community colleges is in order so that it can continue to do what it does best - deliver technical and low-

cost community-based education. Four modifications might be proposed.

First, the first two years of the community college's transfer baccalaureate program could be reconstructed and expanded to include a three-year curriculum terminating in a baccalaureate degree in liberal studies, accounting, education, or business administration.

Second, community colleges already offer a vast variety of two-year technical training. Many of these two-year programs have an upper division baccalaureate component. Why not have them add the upper division technical and liberal arts courses to confer the B.S. degree Community colleges already have the required laboratory facilities that with minor modifications and additions in equipment could serve the next two rungs in the career ladder. This would be far less expensive than having four-year colleges built and staff expensive and unnecessarily duplicative laboratories. It would also allow a better integration and sequence of academic learning by consolidating technical education within one institution. This option would enhance opportunities in associate/baccalaureate degree nursing, medical laboratory technologist/medical technologist, radiologic, data processing/computer science, waste control management/environmental studies, and in many other technical fields. This could both save the taxpayer considerable money and slow the tuition acceleration in private colleges. One modification might be to have community colleges contract the liberal arts component from four-year colleges in those areas where the two coexist.

A third mission modification for the community college movement involves the concept of the middle college whereby selected high school juniors and seniors move into their freshman year of the community college, thus shortening the time necessary to both obtain degrees and require public subsidies. Increasing numbers of high school students run out of challenging subjects or take those which are

directly duplicative of those encountered later in college. What better way to assist the gifted student than accelerating his pace in the educational process?

A fourth suggestion for enhancing the natural role of the community college in post-secondary education is the development of two-year pre-law, pre-medicine, pre-dental, and pre-veterinary programs that provide intensive course work and preparation for student transfer directly to professional schools.

State government then should reaffirm or reexamine, if necessary, its educational philosophy and lay a stronger foundation for the formulation of public policy. Master plans and college mission statements require modernization building on strengths. Artificial geographic barriers must be dismantled. Student and institutional aid should be brought into line with the new learners of post-secondary education and tied to the proper implementation of public policy and institutional efforts to adjust. It must overhaul a taxing system rooted in the past and becoming irrelevant and unjust for the future. State efforts should be directed toward proper planning that recognizes the needs of the local community.

Thus, there are a variety of ways in which states and community colleges can respond to the accelerated demands of its citizens for access to post-secondary education. They require extensive public discussion, intelligent formulation, and judicious implementation. The challenges and opportunities we face have never been greater in our society and the possible rewards never more exciting. We have only begun to tap our potential. Let us hope that public educational policy and aid can focus on the future of post-secondary education rather than the past of higher education.

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